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ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
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Item 12 (a) of the provisional agenda*

WRITING SYSTEMS AND GUIDES TO PRONUNCIATION: ROMANIZATION

Report of the Working Group on Romanization Systems: activities from 24 August 1992 to 12 January 1998

Paper submitted by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names**

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The Group of Experts decided at its sixteenth session in 1992 to reconstitute the Working Group on Romanization Systems with a limited number of members and with one Convenor. Current membership of the Working Group is as follows:
Mr. Abdo (Saudi Arabia), Ms. Burgess (United Kingdom), Mr. Flynn (United States), Mr. Heyda (United States), Mr. Kadmon (Israel), Mr. Lewis (United Kingdom), Ms. Moore (United Kingdom), Mr. Päll (Estonia), Mr. Toniolo (Italy), Mr. Woodman (United Kingdom), Mr. Quinting (United States), Convenor.

The Working Group held two regular meetings during the seventeenth and eighteenth sessions of UNGEGN and a previous meeting during the sixteenth session dealing with organizational issues.

The Working Group has discussed and/or monitored developments regarding the following romanization systems between the Sixth (1992) and the Seventh (1998) United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names:

a) In 1993 the Hellenic Military Geographic Service, Athens, published a three-volume gazetteer of Greece in which all toponyms are rendered in the ELOT 743 romanization system. Thus this work is to be considered the main source containing ELOT spellings.

b) At the fourteenth session of UNGEGN, the Working Group suggested that experts from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea cooperate in devising a single romanization system for Korean to be based on the guidelines the two countries had submitted separately to the Group of Experts. This suggestion was accepted by both countries. The Working Group had hoped that establishment of a joint system would be accomplished. However, progress in this endeavor has not been forthcoming for the last three years.

c) At the Sixth Conference, Thailand submitted a revised romanization system for Thai. Subsequent modifications in the vowel table were made and in September 1997, the Convenor received a finalized version of the system from the Royal Thai Survey Department and sent copies of the system to all members of the Working Group for review.

d) The Working Group considered two versions of a romanization system for Ukrainian. A provisional system was submitted to the seventeenth session of the Group of Experts. It was superseded by another version that Ukraine presented to the eighteenth session. Finalization of the system, although anticipated, has not been achieved at this point.

e) At the eighteenth session of the Group of Experts, it was announced that possible modifications to the Survey of Israel romanization system are being contemplated. (In 1972 this system had been adopted at the Second United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.) The official status of these proposed changes to the system are not known at this time.

Since it is necessary to continue discussion on some of the romanization systems once finalized (see above) and on newly developed systems for scripts not covered thus far, it is recommended that the Seventh Conference extend the mandate of the present Working Group on Romanization Systems.